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should in the future be controlled by corporations and trusts, would the masses feel secure if the great weapon of free debate were denied them? Most assuredly not. I agree with Senator Teller when he says that it may become the highest duty, the greatest obligation, of an American Senator to stand and resist, if he be in the minority, until he has brought the majority to a respectful hearing of his case. The trouble is that the House is no longer a deliberative body, but is dominated by partisan influences and by autocratic rules which admit of no freedom of action. An inflamed condition of the public mind, inordinate desire for power, motives of party revenge—all these can easily be potent in securing the passage through the House of measures that would disgrace the statute books. In the Senate, however, the opposition imposes careful consideration. Time, the great precipitator of all turbidity, intervenes and prevents the hasty vote that would send the objectionable law to the White House for the President's action. Washington never said a truer thing than when he likened the Senate to a saucer into which the hot tea of the House was poured to cool.

The barriers which wise custom has erected and long experience has sanctioned, are not to be torn down in a single night because of unthinking and inconsiderate clamor. The forum of free debate, wherein Clay and Webster in the past and others equally able and statesman-like in the present, have displayed their eloquence and intellectuality, is not to lose through ignorance and prejudice all the honor and the glory with which its great debaters have enshrined it. Against an excited, aggressive, and relentless majority the minority will still find a court where it can be heard without stint and without apologizing for its presence. There is still, thank Heaven! a legislative body where the brake of opposition can be applied to blind and unruly haste.

HENRY LITCHFIELD WEST.

ANOTHER WORD ON PRISON LABOR.

THE employment of prison labor so that it will not compete with free labor is a subject that has received during recent years deep consideration from penologists and those interested in prison reform. The system in vogue at the present time should not be condemned without a fair trial.

The objections raised originally by labor organizations, aided and abetted by manufacturers affected directly by prison labor competition, resulted in the adoption of various methods to keep the convicts in the penal institutions of the State employed. At one time the State employed its convicts largely on State lands. Sing Sing prisoners worked the lime deposits at that institution, while at Clinton the iron mines were developed. No objection is raised to this method of employing convicts, and it has been a mystery to many men why it was ever changed. The penal population of 1,200 in the penitentiary on Blackwell's Island, and the average of 2,000 inmates to be found in the Workhouse, have been always employed for the benefit of the county of New York and to this no one has ever objected.

Labor organizations are on record that convicts shall work, but for thirty years they have protested against a system that places criminals in direct competition with free labor. They have insistently and persistently opposed a law that allowed the work of convicts to come into competition with the products of the legitimate manufacturer.

It has been clearly shown that, under the contract system, manu-

facturers could not compete with the prison makers of stoves or shoes. The legitimate business man was obliged to pay the current rates of wages, rent, insurance, and the other charges that go to make the burdens of a factory, while the contractor of prison labor had his factory free and convicts working for him at from thirty to forty cents a day under a task system which meant severe punishment if the convict failed in his work.

After the contract system came the State account and piece price plans. These were even worse for the State, as the people furnished the immense capital required to establish plants (nearly all of which has been lost to the State), while the goods were sold at ruinous prices. The whole subject was exhaustively discussed before the Constitutional Convention, which set the seal of condemnation upon the unjust methods of employing convict labor which obtained in the past, and adopted an amendment prohibiting the employment of such labor except directly for the State. This has been law for two years, but until very recently the prison managers made no effort to begin work under this new system as specifically directed by the Constitution.

The new Constitution also created a prison commission. This board consists of seven men and one woman, none of whom hitherto has had any special acquaintance with or made any special study of the subject of the employment of prison labor. This board is charged with the work of supervising the system, and, at its very first meeting, declared itself opposed to the old plan of employing labor in our prisons.

The first report of this board in courageous language declared that it is a simple matter to find ample employment for the prisoners now in the penal institutions of the State without placing these convicts as competitors in the open labor market. The new law directs that all State institutions supported wholly or in part by public funds shall obtain as far as possible their necessary supplies from the prisons. I have not space enough to quote more liberally from this report, but it took such important ground on this question that it awoke the dormant energies of the Superintendent of State Prisons, who, in a recent report, declared that he can find work for all the convicts in the State, and that these shall be employed in such a manner that their work will not compete with free labor.

Now that this new system is to be put on trial, I assert that it is only fair for the friends of the old plans to suspend their opposition until time shall demonstrate whether the new system is a success or a failure. Our opponents have always maintained that all they wanted was work for the convicts, but in urging the old plans they never stopped to consider how many free men were deprived of employment by reason of unfair competition. I am rather inclined to believe that those who were not directly interested in contracts were prompted in their opposition by a lack of knowledge of the true facts. I submit a few to show that we have quite a large community depending upon the State—large enough to make a good-sized city, and these the convicts could work for.

I take from the Comptroller's report of 1897 the following facts :

Population of reformatories and charitable institutions.....	6,000
In hospitals.....	19,234
In other institutions, exclusive of prisons.....	6,156

It cost the State nearly six million for the maintenance of this population—food, clothing, etc.—during the fiscal year which ended September 30, 1896. This population of more than 81,000 does not include the inmates of

the protectories, prisons, and penitentiaries, which, if added, would make a total of nearly 50,000 people who are a charge upon the State.

New York has altogether about 4,500 convicts available for work in the penal institutions covered by the new law. These can be employed in the following manner, and as one who has been interested in prison reform for many years, I am sure that there will be very little opposition. A fraction of the convicts could be employed to raise all the vegetables and prepare the food required by this community. Another fraction could cut and grind stone to improve the public highways. Cloth could be woven for the inmates of State institutions. With proper effort no convict need be idle.

It may be said that this system of employing convicts will not yield a profit. Do the people expect profit from convict labor? I think not. All that the public expects is that these institutions shall be made self-supporting, less expense of maintenance. The State of Mississippi has recently demonstrated the practicability of the system I advocate. The matter largely depends upon the men in charge.

There is no labor performed by prisoners that does not compete in some degree with free labor. The problem before us is how to reduce this convict competition to a minimum, and if those in charge of this work in this State will attempt to make the penal population supply the food, clothing, etc., for all public charges, I think the battle will be won, and all lovers of fair play will have cause to rejoice that another species of slavery has been abolished. As to the reformatory influence of labor in our prisons and the statement that constant employment is the only check to insanity, so often referred to by eminent penologists, I wish to say that when I was a member of the prison commission in this State, I examined minutely into the workings of the Elmira Reformatory as compared with our regular State prison. The conclusion reached by our commission was not flattering to the Elmira Reformatory. In fact, the consensus of opinion was that there is no reform unless the prisoner has reformatory tendencies. Those who are reformed do not owe their reformation to rigid rules rigidly enforced, but rather to their own determination to remain out of prison and live a decent life. Work never reformed criminals. The fact that men do not want to work makes them criminals, which is a distinction with a difference.

I believe that the clause of the new law which classifies criminals so that, after a person has been sentenced for the third time, he will be compelled to remain in prison until pardoned, will have more influence in reforming convicts than all the rigid rules adopted by wardens or city boards.

A word as to the development of insanity in our prisons, and I am done. During the past ten years the average each year shows that about fifty-five persons confined in prisons have become insane, and these lapses occurred at times when convicts not only had enough to do, but were overworked. Those who have been familiar with convict life know that insanity never comes from lack of work. The so-called "insane convict" idea is a development of morbid sentimentality.

It is indeed gratifying to me that this fight for prison reform, which I took up in 1871 as President of the Workingmen's Assembly of the State, has been forced to a successful issue. I hope to be permitted to live to testify to the success of this new system of employing prison labor, and am happy in the knowledge that the prison ring of the State of New York with all its power is a thing of the past.

GEO. BLAIR.